

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

SOUTHEAST ASIAN PROJECT

INFORMANT: CHANTHY CHIGAS [CAMBODIA]

INTERVIEWER: PAUL PAGE

DATE: JUNE 30, 1986

P = PAUL

C = CHANTHY

Tape 86.24

P: I am here at the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association and I'm interviewing Chanthy (--) I don't know your last name.

C: Chigas

P: (Spells) C-H-I?

C: G-A-S.

P: G-A-S. Okay. Well, how would you (--) Could you tell me something about your background in Cambodia? What your parents did for work, and your education for example.

C: I was a student from '71 to '75. My father is a teacher. My mother is a sales lady. Yah. My parents are originally from Phnom Penh, outside of Phnom Penh, I don't know where. So my parents moved from Phnom Penh to [Thmar Pouk] City, Province I think. I don't know much about it. Thmar Pouk is near Thailand. It's more the Thailand. So my father teach the children in school from I think grade, high school grades, high students in here I think. My mother sells some fruits, maybe desserts, some fruits that we eat everyday.

P: Yah, at a market.

C: Yah. I go to school, the same school my father go teach the school children, also my brothers and sisters too.

P: Also went to school there? What courses did your father teach?

C: He teaches math, French, and Cambodian history, something like that. He also teach the students how to dance, and I was one of his students too. Yah. He teaches the students how to dance classical, folk, and play the guitar.

P: When you say dance classical, classical for western sense classical?

C: Yah, and modern like they're using right now in here.

P: I was just wondering if he would teach you Cambodian, if he was teaching Cambodian folk dances. Are there Cambodian folk dances?

C: In here?

P: No, in, even in Cambodia.

C: Yes, yes. My father one of them too. Especially classical, he taught classical dance.

P: And guitar too?

C: Yah, guitar and violin.

P: Where did he learn all of these?

C: I think when he was in school, when he was taking a course to be a teacher. Also, he liked, that's the way he is.; he likes to dance, to play, he liked music.

P: So he must have gone to college then?

C: Yes

P: Did most Cambodians go to college?

C: Yes

P: Even though they have such a long high school? You know, High school is what, fifteen years, or so?

C: High school, high school (--) Let's see, from ten (--) I don't know how, what grade in here (meaning U.S.), but I only know in Cambodia. In Cambodia I think high school is

from 7 to 9 grade. And other than that, college, like I grade to 6th grade is college. (P: Oh I see) But I don't know how to compare in here.

P: Yes. What did your father to be when (--) You know how parents want their children to grow up.

C: I don't know [Laughs]. My father didn't tell me what he wants me to be. But I was (--) (P: But what did you want/) I was so young for him to tell me what he wants me to do, but I remember that the last class I attend, which is eighth grade, that the teacher taught me history, Cambodian history; a little bit of French, which I stayed there a year, but I don't know anything now. I forgot all the, I forgot everything about French.

P: What kind of career were you (--)

C: Just basics, yah, basic studies.

P: How old were you when you left Cambodia?

C: I think nine or ten years old.

P: Ten years old, oh. So you were still very (--)

C: Yah, very young.

P: Why don't we talk something about why you did leave Cambodia. Why did you leave?

C: See, after the Pohl Pot, okay, starting from when the Vietnamese captured in Cambodia, I and my family were in the place where I fled when they first started the war. From where I was living before the war to a place that everybody should go when the war starts. So, when no Vietnamese captured in Cambodia, the leader in that, I think, Province, [unclear], the leader of that Province, told us to leave to where we belong, which is Thmar Pouk country, or city. So my family left. That's when my father died already.

P: Oh, your father died.

C: Yeah, my father died a month before the Vietnamese captured in. So we left, we left that small Province to go to Thmar Pouk, which is our, my original place. So that time my mother was smuggler in from Thailand to Cambodia.

P: She was smuggling things?

C: Yes, smuggling things like sarong, like clothes from Thailand, some rice, something that she can support my family here at Thmar Pouk. So she was in and out Thailand to

Cambodia, Cambodia to Thailand. I don't know why. I didn't know when we left Cambodia to Thailand.

P: You didn't know what she was doing?

C: I didn't know at all. So one day she said: "Let's go to" where she was staying when she was smuggler. So we just left, we just left home and we stayed in next camp where my mother used to stay when she was smuggling. We stayed there for I think, a week. And then we left, we left on the last day of the week.

P: So you're saying though that you didn't know what your mother was doing all these years?

C: No, no. She didn't tell.

P: She was probably afraid?

C: She was afraid that, especially my sister is afraid that she didn't want anybody to know. She was afraid that we might die in the middle of the road, because a lot of soldiers and people that kill each other. You know, and a lot of bad things going on there.

P: Do you have any other, any brothers or?

C: I have three brothers and three sisters. Two sisters. No, three sisters, yah, but two sisters in California, and three brothers in California with my mother, and one here in Lowell.

P: With you.

C: Yah. Two of my sisters (--) My two sisters got married, which is one in here, in Lowell, and another one in California, but other than that, in school in California.

P: What camp were you in over in Thailand?

C: First we went to Sakao #1 Camp, which all the black. When I was there I was surprised. I was so surprised that there's no black people. I mean people that wear black. In Pohl Pot everybody had to wear black clothes and short hair. I was thinking that maybe like them now, wearing the regular dress and no dying people. Peaceful. That's what I thought when I came to that camp. So when I came I was shocked that I saw all the black people carrying people dying. (P: Black clothes) Yah, the black clothes. Then it was so terrible.

P: Did Pohl Pot, did they discriminate against people on the base of their color of the skin?

C: Ah, I think 20% that kind of discrimination, but especially education. It's like 90% of that he killed. We stayed in Sakao Camp and then we moved to Mairut Camp in Thailand. (P: How do you spell the second one?) Mairut Camps, M A I R U T, Mairut Camp in Thailand. I liked that camp, because it is near to the beach, and I can go to the beach every week, and any day I could go.

P: But you couldn't really leave the camp itself. There was fences.

C: No, all fences. But when we left Sakao Camp because it was so small, but everybody was pushing in that camp. So they transferred some people to Mairut Camp, that included my family. So we stayed in that camp about two and a half years. No, no, only one and a half year.

P: What year did you go there?

C: '81. (P: '81?) Yah, early '81. We stayed there awhile. I studied. They have a school for Cambodian kids and Cambodian people went to study there. They have a school like in Cambodia. They have a school that studies French, Cambodian, Cambodian art, Cambodian history, [Phone rings] and many kinds of subjects that they're teaching over there. I don't know if they still have that program over there now, but I enjoyed it very much. And after I worked, after in school about three months, I have a job as a dentist assistant. I worked there for a while. And then I have an [unclear] to Philippines, and I volunteered working over there about 7 months.

P: You were transferred to the Philippines. [C: Yes, yah] What, you go there by plane there?

C: By plane, yah.

P: Did you know that you were coming to the United States?

C: Yes, that's why we have a [name] to transfer to the Philippines. We had to have a name. We had to know that we are going to be here. That's why the transfer.

P: What made you come to the United States?

C: That's my mother's idea. [Laughs] She doesn't want to stay anymore in the country. There was a lot of things going on, fighting, bombing every day. So I guess she decided to come here, because just only my mother stayed there. My mother, and my brothers, and sister, and nobody else.

P: Over where? Where is your mother now?

C: She's in California.

P: Oh she's stayed there. (C: Yah) What did you know about America when you were in Cambodia?

C: I didn't know nothing about America until, until I stay in a camp, in Sakao Camp, the first camp we stayed in. The first thing I know about this, because I saw American workers over there. It is so much going on about the United States. That's how I know. I started to learn English a little bit, working a little bit.

P: So your whole family went to the Philippines. (C: Yah) Then you went to California?

C: Yah, that's the first state we be in there.

P: Did you get any sort of help with the culture that you were coming into, like training, you know, orientation, or?

C: When we were in the Philippines, it's a program for the refugees to learn more about Americans and the United States. And I attend ESL class, which is English as a Second Language. After that I took a CO Class, which means Cultural Orientation Class. Then I finished that class, then I said, United States.

P: What were some of the things they were teaching you at the cultural orientation?

C: Um, that's about in the United States; using the phone; renting an apartment; school; shopping; sort of that.

P: Do you feel that it prepared you for what you found in the country?

C: Yah, going to school, learning, especially school that I'd been preparing before I come to here.

P: Now do you know some of the ways? Can you think of some ways off hand that America is different from Cambodia, the life in Cambodia?

C: Life here?

P: Yah, how is it different from (--)

C: That's a very tough question.

P: It's my sense that there must be a lot of differences, you know, between the Cambodia and the United States.

C: Yah, I know what you mean. Like in Cambodia there's all the farms, farms like rice fields, vegetable farms, different kinds of vegetable farms, coconut farms, and everything, everything in tropical. Not in here, like in here. Also like transportation is a little bit different. Like, we use a lot of bicycles going to work; almost 90% bicycle, and 10% using car. And in here we usually use cars instead of bicycles.

P: How about police people?

C: Police people? Police, I don't remember if we had police, or not around the province. I don't remember.

P: Are they, well, were they more noticeable in this country, or are they more noticeable in the United States?

C: Yes, yes, yes, it is more noticeable in here. In Cambodia, like house, like your house, like a building, a building which is supposed, they have to have something like inspection, right? Inspection before you can move in. In Cambodia there's nobody comes to inspect your house or buildings, just build and move in, right? But some of the lands we can buy from the state, or city, or province; whatever you belong to.

P: You know the Cambodian Temple here in Chelmsford, I think, they were having problems with their neighbors. (C: Yes) Someone told me it had to do with this idea of just buying a building and moving in.

C: Ah huh. Ah huh. We didn't know that, until, until the problems were going on. The problem, until the neighbors have their complaints against to the Temple. We have a lawyer, but the lawyer didn't know about this stuff. So now everything is okay. We have permit, occupancy permit so that people can come and do the celebration.

P: Now what brought you to Lowell?

C: When I was in California, I went to school there, and worked there as a full-time student and a full-time worker. So I was under my mother's support. That means she didn't help me. I didn't get money from anywhere, but working and earn a little money from working. One day she said she cannot support me. So I have a sister here with her husband, called me when I (--) They wanted me to come here, because they said they have a good job here. So one day I decided to ship out and left (laughs)! And that's it.

P: Did you have a sponsor family in California?

C: Yes, I had my uncle. Yah, but it ain't too much support from them, because they are refugees too, and they have a lot of kids to take care of. We only have the name of a sponsor, but not much support from them; everything in our own hands.

P: Oh yah. What was your first job in the United States?

C: Working as a nurse in a nursing home.

P: Did you understand English well enough?

C: Yes, yes. I went to high school about a year. I didn't finish that. So I went to this school that I can extend my education to get my diploma. I went to adult school in Long Beach. (P: Oh yah) Yah, so I got that.

P: What other kinds of students were in class with you there? Well, did you have mostly all Southeast Asians, or Spanish?

C: Yah, Southeast Asians, Spanish, and Lao, Laotians, and American, Vietnamese too. In that school there is a big number of Cambodian students. When I was there it wasn't too much Cambodian students. When I was there it wasn't too much. It wasn't very much Cambodians. After I left about a year, and when I went back to visit my teacher, there's another [unclear]. It seemed like all Southeast Asians there, Spanish, the Spanish people were there.

P: Do you remember your first impression when you came off of the plane, out into the city, or [unclear]?

C: My first impression, I don't think I had any impression at all, because I learned a lot in the Philippines. The Philippines is like the United States. It wasn't too much.

P: What kind of things did you see here that you never would have seen before in Cambodia?

C: Like tall buildings. Like these kinds of buildings. Houses that were very near each other. Supermarkets, and department store, the school, and you know, and working place. To me, it is very, very special, it's a very special place. I used to see bamboo houses, small houses, and I never seen these kinds of clothes before. So it's very, very good.

[Tape is turned off, then on again]

P: So you were just saying you've never seen houses like this here, or clothes?

C: Yah, the way they build houses in here and houses in Cambodia.

P: Did you bring anything over with you from Cambodia?

C: I don't have anything left, even not a picture of my father. I don't have anything. I don't have anything at all, just a pair of clothes. And now I don't have anything, nothing at all. But my mother found a picture of my father from his friends, and I told her to send me a copy. And that's all I have from Cambodia. No jewels, no clothes, nothing.

P: You just left everything behind?

C: Just left, yah. Like pictures, we took some pictures when the Pohl Pot Regime, but they were took by the people, Pohl Pot people, and that's all. Even pots, pans, any little pieces of things from Cambodia, we don't have it now.

P: Do you ever hope to go back to Cambodia?

C: No, maybe just for a visit. Especially, I was thinking that I don't think that any people in the country will welcome us, or I don't think that we will have any place to stay. If we go to a place that have hotel, or motel, maybe we can stay. If we plan to go back and stay, I don't know. If we really, really just (--) If I (--) Okay, to me, if I plan to go back there to stay there forever, maybe I will have to start everything all over, just like when I first came to live in the United States. Everything was new, culture and everything.

P: You mean you feel it's actually a new culture you would have to learn going back?

C: I think so, yes.

P: So you seem to be one, you are one of the few people I've met that you know, wouldn't really care to go back that way. A lot of people would, you know, want to go back to Cambodia.

C: Yah. When I was in Cambodia, my family have our own land, you know. Like right now we left, and then the house burned out..

P: Got burned?

C: Yah, got burned when the Vietnamese capture in. I don't know who is taking that land now. Maybe it's the city or some other owners, I don't know. I don't know how much they've changed over there in Cambodia.

P: Well now here you are in Lowell, and what were some of your experiences here in Lowell?

C: Working in the community like this, and knowing people in here. If I compare Lowell to California, Lowell has more historic story, and I like it. That's one of my experiences that I learned. In California, my experience is that the city, the whole city is like Cambodia. Like the weather, especially weather, and a lot of Cambodians living there.

Tape I, Side A ends

Tape I, Side B begins

P: You feel that California is more like Cambodia?

C: Yes, especially the weather, the weather, and here, about the history, the history of this country.

P: Now what have you been, you've been working for the Cambodian MAA for a few year?

C: Yes, a year, a year and three months now.

P: How did you get involved here?

C: My brother-in-law used to work here. And I (--) Before I had this job, I had another job beside this in IRS. Yah. So when I worked there as a full-time, I, at that time I didn't go to school until now, but I needed something part-time. So he took me here and then I wasn't thinking about working here, or in the community, but I was thinking that I would want to get a job like a nurse, in nursing home. So that Mr. Michael Ben Ho was a job developer before in the community. He found out that I can speak good enough English to work with Americans and interpret to good Cambodian people. So he put me in the Housing Counselor here. That's why I got involved with them. Then after that, there's some lady, a lady that teach the students, little kids how to learn the Cambodian language. She didn't like that. So Joan is asking me if I can do that. So I say, it's okay, I can do you know, only three hours on Saturday. So why don't I do that. That's another job that I work.

P: Now I know you're married now. Where did you live in Lowell before you were married?

C: Yah, I live in Lowell.

P: What part?

C: In Branch Street, (Laughs) and to Washington Street.

P: Was it poor housing, or?

C: In Branch Street we rent a good condition apartment, which is \$500 a month, with my sister and my brother-in-law. We stayed there with another family, which is related to my brother-in-law too.

P: How did you get along with two families?

C: See, I didn't see them much, often, because they had jobs. They're all working first shifts. And I really seldom see them. Like I have second job. I work second job, and I worked second shift. And then I worked first shift. So it's kind of switching. Sometime

I see them three hours, or two hours. Then we moved to Washington Street in Lowell, which when my brother-in-law bought a house there. That's where we got married.

P: So when did you get married?

C: December 22nd.

P: You didn't have any problems with you marrying a Greek person?

C: It's a little bit of a problem, because my sister especially, she didn't expect me to get married to an American person. But my mother is okay. It's, you know, it's up to me. My sister is a little bit cultural people. She doesn't want to (--) She just like Cambodian can married the Cambodian people. She's like that.

P: What were your feelings when (--) Well how did (--) If you don't mind me asking, too much, how did the whole relationship develop? Where did you meet your husband?

C: I met him at work, which is at in this community. We started to know each other. We didn't have any date, but just feeling. So. I just say okay. I know that, I mean I feel like I know he is a good man. I know that I can depend on him. So that's how I say yes to him, and he say yes to me. [Laughs] It is a little bit difficult if you talking about Cambodian culture and then American. Like right now after, you know, all the problem that we had before the marriage, and then now, I feel like, I don't feel like I don't want to be American always, and I don't want to be a Cambodian always. So sometimes I need to learn what I should know in American ways. And then one day I think I should know some of the Cambodian ways that I should hold it, I should remember. I should learn all kind of stuff. It is very difficult. Even though I live in the United States, it is very difficult to learn to live with another person, to know only a little bit of the same culture. So [unclear] a little bit. It's hard to deal with sometimes. It's just like one day he has a friend that has, that open the party. And then he just want to go. His friend didn't call him, but he hear from another friend. So he asked me if he can go, if he can go, and I said "No, I don't want to," because in Cambodian culture if your friend don't call you to the party, you don't go. Even though your other friend knows that you should go, you don't go. But my husband, he just go, because he lived with his friends almost all of his life. He wants to go. I said, "I don't want to go. That's another problem. You stay, I go. We can't, we can't go.

P: How about when you were dating, I understand that there are differences between American, you know, relations and the Cambodian relationships. Did you experience any of those?

C: I don't. I have friend. I have a classmate that I can talk to when I have problem with my course, with my subject. I can call him up, or maybe go to the park tomorrow or tonight, but with some of my girlfriends or his friends. I cannot go, even though my mother let me go, I don't want to do that, because I'm shy. But Cambodia, Cambodian

culture, if you want to date someone you have to know that he or she will get marry with you.

P: You have to know ahead of time?

C: You have to know ahead, because it really hurt when you break up. [Laughs]

P: What kind of, what church did you get married in?

C: I don't.

P: You didn't go to church?

C: I didn't go to church.

P: So you mean you (--)

C: We had a ceremony at home and we invited monks. Go, and then we have reception at the Lo Kai Restaurant. Yah, we have a Cambodian culture wedding.

P: Oh, so it was a Cambodian. (C: Umhm) It was more Cambodian than (--). (C: Yah, yah) So you consider yourself a practicing Buddhist maybe?

C: Yes, but my family, especially now, only my mother, and my brothers, and my sisters we are a very young generation. My mother doesn't usually go to the temple.

[Phone rings. Tape is turned off, then on again]

P: So you were saying that your mother doesn't go to the church that much.

C: She doesn't go to the temple that much.

P: You don't call it church do you?

C: We don't call it church, we call it temple. [Laughs] It's okay. We go to the temple sometime. We celebrate, you know, like American does in church, but my mother doesn't go that much. It's just the way she is. She is not saying that she's in America, should stay home. No, but that's the way she is. And that's why sometimes I go to the temple, sometimes I don't in here.

P: Does your (--) Has your husband gone with you to the temple?

C: Yes, he was to teach the monk how to speak English. Yah, but not anymore. He is just busy at work

P: That's not easy to do, teach people English.

C: Yah.

P: Teach any language. How is your mother adjusting to the United States?

C: She's adjusting very well, but she can still only speak a very little of English now. It's very hard. She can go to school, and she can be in class like they are now. She can learn, but when she gets home, she's got to think about the telephone bill, about the rent every month, and then cooking for my brothers and my sisters. So she said, "I can go to school, and I can learn, she said, but when she gets home everything is gone. [Laughs] I call her last time, and she told me that welfare called her if she wanted a job, and she said she couldn't speak any English. I told her that she should go to school more to learn more about English. And she said she doesn't care anymore, because she learn and learn and learn and it still won't help her anything. She can still say hello. And she can go shopping, cashing checks, buying TV, something like that. Especially she can listen and she can understand it more than she can talk.

P: Did you have TV sets (C: Yes) [unclear] in Cambodia?

C: No only radio.

P: So when you came to the United States you had to learn how to use all of these things.

C: Yes, but we learned when we were in the Philippines too, learn how to adjust TV, and radio, stereo here.

P: So everyone, everyone is going home now. (C: I think so) How many hours do they spend?

C: Ah, two hours. Two hours yah, two hours.

P: Two hours everyday?

C: Umhm. That's all for the survival class. (P: Survival) Yah, survival class in afternoon, and in the morning it's advance class.

P: What kind of problems do the Cambodians face when they first come to the United States?

C: Language especially. Language, yes. Some of these people learn English in the Philippines or Thailand, still they couldn't use that experience in here. It's just absolutely not, because some of them don't even know Cambodian, don't even know how to write or read Cambodian. My mother, she learns French. She knows a little bit of French, but still she have a hard time learning English.

P: Well I guess, when you get older it gets harder.

C: She's only forty [laughs].

P: Well they say that after age fifteen or so, it is nearly impossible to pick up a language. I've been trying to learn French. Well it's one of those things, even though I can read it and write it, and understand it, I can't speak it very well, and I don't think I ever will. Every person is different I think. Some people can speak, but don't know how to write, you know, the other language.

C: Just like me, sometime I have a little difficulty in speaking and giving speech, even in writing, writing reports. So there's a little of that. I still have a hard time thinking.

P: How well are you and your husband managing, you know, the two different cultures?

C: We are doing okay. If some things I don't want to do, it's okay with him.

P: Did you go on a honeymoon after you were married?

C: Yes, we went to Boston. [Laughs] We went to Boston.

P: Normally though, would the Cambodian people go (--)

C: Um, some people do, some people don't. But in the United States, I don't know if Cambodian couples go to the honeymoon after the wedding, after their marriage. I don't think they even think about it. But some people like me, and Sanith Sok, yah, he go, he went to honeymoon after his marriage.

P: He said he was one of the first people in Lowell to do something like that.

C: I think so, spend time somewhere.

P: I guess his wife wasn't (--) His wife (--) He's more Americanized than (--)

C: Yes, yes. He's, I don't know much. I really know about his wife, but I know Sanith because we work at the same place. You know, I help him a little bit sometimes, and he helped me sometimes. That's how I know him.

P: This may be a difficult question, but what made you want to become involved with an American husband? I mean, just the idea?

C: I don't know. Some people say, "Oh," this is what I heard from somewhere. Some people say, "Getting married with American person, is rich," you know. They think that Americans are rich. But to me, I don't know, I just you know, "Okay, let's get married." I

didn't think of things like that. We just want to be good together. That's what I thought. Oh, maybe he's good to me, and that's it. I never thought of something like, oh he's rich. He has big land. He had beautiful house. I never thought about that.

P: Do you find other Cambodians accepting your marriage?

C: Yes, yes, especially old people that know him when he went to the temple. Is that my question to you, my answer to you?

P: Well, I was just wondering if people would shun, or avoid your company now that you are married to an American. Some people could misunderstand what you are doing. They might think you are trying to, you know, spite the Cambodian people.

C: No, I don't think so. I don't know what they are thinking, but I never heard anything from them. Some of the old people that know him, they really welcome him that he got married with me. Yah, because they, the way I heard is that he has a feeling like Cambodian boy; like gentle, quiet, friendly to people. That's what I heard from the old people at the temple. [Laugh]

P: So at home what kind of meals do you prepare for?

C: Ah, usually Cambodian meal like rice, soup, curry. Sometime I don't, when I don't have time to cook, maybe I fry some chicken, salad, Cambodian salad.

P: What is Cambodian salad?

C: It is like American salad, like salad with some dressing. But Cambodian salad is that we put some lettuce in a plate, and some cucumbers, some onions, all kind of stuff we use in American salad, but the only thing that's different is the sauce and meat. We fry some meat and put it on the salad. We have some sauce like fish sauce, and some sugar, some salt. And when we eat, we eat with rice and we dip it in the sauce and eat. That's the simple one.

P: Did you notice that just a few years ago there were practically no, no Southeast Asian stores in Lowell? No, no place where you could go to buy food. I think you'd probably have to go to Boston to get everything you wanted.

C: No, when I came there was a lot of store there. Phnom Penh Store. There is only one there.

P: There is only one (--)

C: Phnom Penh store. Cambodian Store.

P: So you can't go into a Vietnamese store and get the same thing'?

C: I can go, but maybe (--) I never go to the Vietnamese store, maybe Laotian. Me, I can go to a Laotian store, but maybe they don't have the same kind of things I want. Maybe only a Cambodian store. Or maybe the Cambodian store doesn't have anything I want, and I go to the Laotian store.

P: When it comes time to celebrate holidays, do you both, do you celebrate both holidays, Cambodian New Year, (C: Yah, umhm) what is it, in March? (C: Yah, March, March 13th.) Vietnamese in February?

C: Um, I don't celebrate Vietnamese, but American's and Cambodian's is okay. I don't mean to discriminate. (P: No, but you're not a Vietnamese, I know) But, yah, but I don't know about Vietnamese. Thai or Lao like Cambodian, and Americans (--)

P: It's funny, but there seems to be different New Year's in Southeast Asia. Why is that?

C: I think it is like Cambodian and American, you know.

P: But you're neighboring countries. You're right (--) But there seems to be a great deal of difference between Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos.

C: I don't know about that, but Thai, Lao, and Cambodia have the same celebration of New Year. (P: Oh I see) But Chinese different. Chinese, and Vietnamese I think are the same day. (P: Oh yah, the same day, probably) I don't know why they separate like that. I don't know why the South Asians have different. Maybe like Cambodian, or Southeast Asian people and American people, you know what I mean? Like different time, different days of the month.

P: In the people who are coming over from Cambodia, they have all different, different educational backgrounds.

C: Yes, and different kinds of speaking (P: Ability), like dialects.

P: Now in this country there's, I don't know, you'd call it discrimination against people who come from different parts of our own country, from the south and the north, and the west. Does the same kind of attitudes operate among Cambodians, where the southerners from Phnom Penh feel superior to the northerners, and the, you know, or the people in the mountains?

C: No, not at all. Just like in America. No discrimination, but I don't know why Pohl Pot. [Laughs] Pohl Pot is really, really bad. Yah, I live through the years, and I found that it is really bad. Like last week I heard some people playing fireworks, and I started, "Oh no, not again!" I [unclear] staying home myself, and I heard, I heard that. I said, "No, no, not again."

P: You thought it was a war or something?

C: Yah, I thought it was a war. I think that the more I live far away from my family, the more I think that way. When I was with my family, I didn't even think of that. It's awful.

P: Think of what?

C: What's going to happen, like in Pohl Pot.

P: Are the Cambodians in this country afraid of people among them who might be trying to kill them, or from the government in Cambodia?

C: No.

P: Some Vietnamese have (--) South Vietnamese fear North Vietnamese agents here in this country looking for them, people who were in the government of South Vietnam.

C: No, not Cambodians. I don't know. That's what I don't know.

P: What kind of fears do Cambodians have, or don't they have any anymore? [Laughs]

C: I don't know.

P: Some might fear for their lives, you know, just surviving. Others might be afraid that they're going to lose their culture, you know.

C: Like me, I'm afraid I am going to lose my culture. I'm going to be an American always. After thirty years of age maybe [laughs]. Sometimes I can't even speak in my Cambodian, my own language.

P: Sometimes you can't ?

C: Sometime I forgot, but I can read well in Cambodian, but not in Cambodian terminology. Maybe I cannot understand some of them, maybe 30% of them. [Unclear] speaking, sometimes I don't know what I'm talking about. Like the way I act at the temple, the monk's always teaching me the way I bow, the way I (--) [Chuckles]

P: They're trying to teach you the way to bow? (C: Yah, yah) You don't do it right?

C: I mean, I don't know. [Laughs]

Tape I, side B ends

Tape II, side A begins

P: You still haven't answered whether you know what kind of fears the Cambodians [unclear].

C: I don't know. (P: You don't know?) I think I answer your question, is that one of my clients in the afternoon, they are worried, and educated people. The fear they have now is that they don't know what they're going to do if the welfare is cut, if the welfare stops. They don't understand English, and they don't read any Cambodian, or write Cambodian. It's really bad. They don't have (--) Well they have children in here, but they are all married. They have their own family. She has four family with (--) I mean four people in the family and one of the child is deaf. I don't know if the child is going to help the family about knowing the language. It is very hard. That's their fear now, and I don't know what's in the future. Maybe the same thing, maybe even worse, and they couldn't learn English. They really cannot learn.

P: So what made, what would make people like that want to come to the United States in the first?

C: They don't want to stay in the country. There is a bomb going on, there's a war going on there. People dying, no food, no place to live, no medical treatment. So that's why they decide to come, maybe better than over here. It is better, but still very hard for them to deal with culture and the life. It's really pretty bad.

P: Do you find yourself trying to help, or in what ways can you help people?

C: I can help them trying to learn. I can help them a little, to learn more I mean just stand up you know, stand up, learn especially language, or maybe if they cannot learn English, they can learn how to deal with the people and to know more about what's going on.

P: So you're saying that a lot of people are almost lost here?

C. Yes. [Laughs].

P: Because they don't (--) Well I mean I'd feel lost if I didn't know the language, or anyone. (C: Yah) Well I know, I realize you help one another, but if I was to go to Germany, or something I'd be frightened out of my, because I don't know the language at all.

C: Yah, but Cambodians that live in here, even, even like people that come to school here, like when they come the way they used to come to school, and they don't want to use anywhere. I mean they used to come on this, on High Street, and only come High Street. They don't want to go anywhere. It's very hard. Or like when we moved to this new place (125 Perry St.), and the people keep saying, "It's very far, it's very far. I don't know where it is, I cannot find it." But to me, it is very near, and it is very easy to find. Even though they know, even though they live here (--) [Phone rings].

[Tape turned off, then on again]

P: Do you remember what you were saying just a moment ago? About there are people saying it's too far.

C: Yah, they think it is a little bit too far for them, even though they have been here two years or three years, they can't even find the place. They're really frightened to try another way, a new way.

P: What do you hope? Where do you hope to be in the future? Are you going to stay working here, or?

C: I don't know how long this program last. How long is this community last? And I hope that we will have this community going on year round, you know. I don't mind finding a new job, but it's many Cambodian people that come here to know anything of a new life in here. Even though they have learn before in Thailand or in Philippines, we have to have this kind of community in the city.

P: Do you think there needs to be more done for the Cambodian people in the city here?

C: What do you mean?

P: Well do you think these programs are enough? Do you think what is being done is enough?

C: I think so. I really think so. Yah, because they have schools. They can come, especially people that hardly learn. They can come here. The teacher explain really close. They have tutoring person to come. Very good.

P: Probably just one more, one (--) You're the first Cambodian woman that I've interviewed, and I'm just wondering what, how do Cambodian men and women, how they are supposed to act together, and then how has America changed the way you used to see one another? For example, in some cultures the women, the ladies are supposed to be, they could be submissive, on the other hand they could be domineering, you see. They could be stronger than the husband. And then in other cultures they're weaker than the husband. So I'm just wondering what in Cambodian society, how do men and women see one another. How has it changed?

C: This is in Cambodia, okay. When husband and wife are living together, okay, in Cambodia, husband has to go to work and the wife had to stay home to cook for the husband to come home from work, or take care of works at home, children, washing clothes, all kinds of stuff. Right now it can be anybody. I mean it cannot be like that in here in America. If it be like that in America people would be starving, because it can only one person working for the ten people, supporting ten people in Cambodia. We

cannot do that in here. Everybody has to go to work and everybody has to support themselves. It is really hard. As far as a lot of Cambodian people have a lot of kids, when they live now it is very hard. If they are seventeen, or eighteen years old, it is okay. They can go to work. If it's like ten, and ten to five, or ten to two, it's very hard to take care of, and one family. It's very hard for my parents.

P: So does that make it (--) That makes it hard for people to adjust to. Well.

C: But Cambodian family, especially kids, parents like to depend on each other. Like Americans, if children who are 18 years old, right, have to be live away from the parents, right? They have to go on their own, right? Cambodian people don't do that. You can get married and stay with the parents. You can go to work, and share a little bit of money to the parents. But nowadays in America, a lot of people don't do that. They like the way the American do. [Laughs] And I think, whatever it is in America, especially those kinds of things; especially money.

P: Well, so I guess I've asked you all of the questions I can think of for now. So thank you.

C: You're welcome.

Interview ends